

Kingston City Hall  
408 Broadway  
Kingston  
Ulster County  
New York

HABS No. NY-5570

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20243

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. NY-5570

## KINGSTON CITY HALL

Location: 408 Broadway, Kingston, Ulster County, New York.  
Latitude 41° 55' 37" Longitude 73° 59' 50"

Present Owner  
and Occupant: City of Kingston.

Present Use: Governmental Administration.

Significance: A large monumental structure, built in the nineteenth century to emulate the Italian governmental palaces, was rebuilt after a fire in 1927. In addition to its original features, it combines nineteenth and early twentieth century eclectic styles in a rich variety of architectural detail.

The Kingston City Hall was built during the railroad and canal era in the nineteenth century in connection with the city's important economic activities and growth.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The City Hall building was constructed in 1873.
2. Architect: English born Arthur Crooks of New York City designed the building.
3. Original and subsequent owners: 1873 Deed: 4 February 1873 Recorded: 5 February 1873, liber 180, page 142. John O'Reilly, Cecilia B. O'Reilly, his wife, Mary O'Reilly, his mother to the city of Kingston. "This conveyance being made upon the condition that the City of Kingston shall erect upon the premises hereby conveyed a City Hall worth at least the sum of sixty thousand dollars within three years from the first day of February 1873 and that the said premises be occupied only for public purposes..."
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Not known.
5. Original plan and construction: The original building cost \$75,000. Arthur Crooks' plans, a small portion of which are in the possession of the City Engineer's Office, suggest that the original building was influenced by the Palazzo Pubblico in Sienna, Italy.
6. Alterations and additions: The building was seriously

damaged in a fire in 1927. Its roof and tower were wiped out. The building was rebuilt the following year under the direction of associated architects Myron Teller, George Lowe and Gerard Betz. The original characteristics of the tower and the roof were substantially modified and were made plain-looking, excluding the original balcony. The roof has a mansard roof at the present time. The original roof was a steep hipped roof with a smaller, intersecting hipped roof on either side of the building. Most exterior characteristics, however, were left intact. Also, concrete beams were installed to support the interior floors.

The front room in the third floor once contained a raised platform with a Gothic niche. It is not known when it was removed.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

In the nineteenth century the railroads and the steamboats were on the move to transport people and goods. Kingston was one of the terminals in the United States. It was ideally located at the intersection of three railroads, and was also a terminal for the Delaware and Hudson Canal. Its cement products and native bluestone provided income for the town. In response to these growing economic activities, the villages of Kingston and Rondout were consolidated and incorporated as the City of Kingston. Immediately the City Hall was built to serve the new city.

Arthur Crooks, the architect, was born in England. He immigrated to the United States in the 1850s. He served as a Colonel in the Union Army during the Civil War. For a time he worked in Richard Upjohn's office before beginning his private practice. He is best known for his residence and church architectural works.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Original architectural drawings: Architect Arthur Crooks' drawings of the City Hall are in possession of City Engineer's Office, Kingston, Ulster County, New York.
2. Old views: A photocopy of City Hall with its original features, from the Picturesque Ulster, published 1896. Included in the HABS collection.
3. Bibliography:
  - a. Primary and unpublished sources:  
Deeds, County Clerk's Office, Ulster County Office Building, Kingston, New York.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Sylvester, Nathaniel Bartlett. History of Ulster County, New York. Philadelphia, 1880.

De Lisser, R. Lionel. Picturesque Ulster. Kingston, New York, 1896.

Hutton, George V., Jr. Kingston, New York, from F., Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased). Los Angeles: New Age Publishing Company, 1956.

"Fritz Franz Engel", pamphlet on the artist in possession of the County Clerk's Office, Kingston, New York.

Prepared by: William C. Badger  
Historian  
Historic American Buildings  
Survey  
Summer 1972

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The City Hall is a noteworthy example of the polychromatic Victorian public buildings of the nineteenth century which incorporated a variety of historical styles.
2. Condition of fabric: The over-all condition of the building is fair. However, its deterioration is proceeding rapidly due to neglectful maintenance. Fire and subsequent rebuilding have altered some exterior originality.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The south (front) facade of the City Hall is 100' -10" (nine-bay front) x 71' -7". The east and west facades each have seven bays. The north (rear) facade has ten bays. The building is a three-story structure with an attic.
2. Foundation: The foundation is limestone ashlar with a beveled stone water table.

KINGSTON CITY HALL  
HABS No. NY-5570 (page 4)

3. Wall construction, finish and color: The exterior walls are red brick laid in stretcher bond, with horizontal bands of white brick and bluestone at the window sill and lintel levels of each story.
4. Structural system, framing: The building's main structural system is brick bearing wall construction. Concrete pan joists and slabs also support the building throughout. The roof's framing system consists of steel trusses with concrete pads. Some interior parts of the building have brick bearing wall construction as well as concrete blocks and poured concrete walls. Concrete beams, installed following the 1927 fire, support the interior floors.
5. Porches: There are brick gabled porticus-like projections on either side of the building. They are medieval in inspiration with a gabled roof of slate, and a four-centered arched doorway with flanking sandstone Corinthian columns with limestone bases. The tower, modified in 1927, contains a three arched Italianate loggia with Corinthian capitals and a wrought-iron rail.
6. Chimneys: Four large brick chimneys have been removed and capped and no longer project above the roof line at the present time.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The principal entranceway is located in the base of the tower and is medieval in character with a four-centered arch and a fixed glass tympanum. A decorative wrought-iron screen in a medieval design covers the glass. Cluster columns with Corinthian capitals step back on either side. The lintel has a design of an entwining foliage. Flanking the entrance are a pair of brick pilasters with notable capitals consisting of carved stone foliate and animal designs topped with single griffins. The double doors are twelve-paneled steel hollow core doors with a rectangular transom above. Behind these doors there is a wrought-iron screen as large as the corridor. It has a plateglass backing.

KINGSTON CITY HALL  
HABS No. NY-5570 (page 5)

The secondary entrances on the east and west facades of the building are of similar design to the front doors. The tympana are glass divided into many panes.

- b. Windows and shutters: Windows vary in size, number of panes, framing and decoration throughout the building. They are steel casement windows in every case and are generally twelve- and fifteen- paned single casements with four- and five- paned fixed sidelights and eight-paned transoms above. Other windows are double casements eight panes each with an eight-paned transom. The windows in the third level of the tower are Gothic arched windows with cast stone ornamented tympana. Higher in the tower three slender lancets are casement windows set within a stepped pointed arch surround. First floor windows set within a stepped pointed arch surround. First floor windows are set in brick Gothic arcades. Prominent windows placed over the porches on the east and west facades of the building are Gothic arched casements. All the windows on the third floor have decorative cast sandstone spandrels under them.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: A rectangular multi-colored slate mansard roof is flat on top with a built-up covering. The sides of the roof have slate shingles. Before the 1927 fire, the roof form was more complex, consisting of a number of intersecting pitched hipped roofs with dormers.
- b. Cornice: The building is surrounded by a simple brick denticulated cornice with a frieze of decorative cut stone.
- c. Dormers: The dormers have hipped roofs covered with slate shingles and have casement windows. Two dormers are located on either facade of the building, front or back, and three dormers on either side of the side wall.
- d. Tower: The tower is situated high in the center of the front facade. After the fire in 1927, the tower was modified from its original elaborate design (See photocopy of photo, circa 1896, included in the HABS collection). The original tower was apparently inspired by, and similar in design to, the Palazzo Publico in Sienna, Italy. Presently, the modified tower has a plain design and is a somewhat taller, mutli-level structure with an Italianate loggia and a pyramidal roof.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. First floor:

On axis with the longitudinal side of the building and perpendicular to the main entry which is above this level is a hall. It ends in vestibules which contain open stair wells. The principal room on the north side is the City Court and is flanked by the City Judge's chambers, record vaults and steno offices on one side, and a police lounge, lockers and jail on the other. Directly across the hall from the Court Room are mechanical equipment rooms with the offices of the Board of Health to the west and the police to the east.

b. Second floor:

The main floor of the building is entered by a flight of stairs and consists of a vestibule and monumental stair hall at right angles to the street. The main hall is parallel to the street and is terminated at either end by open stair wells. Public reception rooms and offices open from this central space on either side.

c. Third floor:

The third floor plan is dominated by the large Common Council room which is approximately 56' X 70'. At the south end of this room, there was a rostrum with a Gothic niche behind. The raised portion has now been removed. The open stair wells on either side of this room have connections with the rest of the building. Two anterooms occupy the space on either side of the well of the tower on the south. Offices flank the stair wells on north and south.

d. Attic:

The attic space is a large inaccessible area except for spaces to the east of the well of the tower and a pair of rooms on the east side of the upper part of the stair wells.

2. Stairway:

The principal stair situated at the main entrance is an open stair hall with marble treads and risers and brass handrails. It rises in a straight run and is slightly smaller than the width of the stair hall itself.

The secondary stairs are at either end of the building and are open well, U-shaped stairs with cast-iron stringers and marble treads and risers. The rail is wrought-iron with cast-iron newel post and wrought-iron scroll side braces.

There is a steel stairway along the wall of the tower which extends from the third level up and gives access to the tower's loggia

3. Flooring: The most notable floor is a mosaic of terrazzo and marble located in the main hall of the second floor. Floors in other parts of the building are modern vinyl asbestos tile and vinyl and ceramic tile.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The building's walls and ceilings are plaster, scored and smooth. The most notable ceiling is found in the Council Room in the third floor. This ceiling has a large cove created by metal lath and plaster into which twenty-three drop arched niches have been inserted. Inset in these arches are the twenty-three bas-reliefs by Fritz Franz Engel, a New York artist of German birth. The "historical lunnettes" depict scenes from the histories of Kingston, Rondout and the United States. They are listed as follows:

- (1) Seal of the City of Kingston
- (2) Union of the North and South



KINGSTON CITY HALL  
HABS No. NY-5570 (Page 8)

- (3) "Leave us have peace", the spirit of the Revolutionary War
- (4) Henry Hudson's ship "Half Moon" on the Hudson
- (5) Francis Lovelace - Colonial Governor who gave Kingston its first name
- (6) Peter Stuyvesant
- (7) Peace with Indians, 1660
- (8) Chief Justice John Jay drafting first Constitution for the State of New York, 1777
- (9) Robert Fulton's ship "Clermont" in Rondout harbor
- (10) The Wyncoop House - where George Washington and his staff were entertained in 1772.
- (11) A scene of Wall Street about 1830
- (12) Old Kingston Academy
- (13) First Dutch Church
- (14) Senate House
- (15) Old Court House
- (16) Fur trading with Indians at Rondout
- (17) Rachel Dumont - the brave girl who warned city of the coming of the British in October 16, 1777
- (18) George Washington's letter to freeholders and commonality of Town of Kingston following his visit after the burning of Kingston.
- (19) George Clinton
- (20) Old seal of village of Kingston
- (21) Dutch settlers in New Amsterdam
- (22) World War I
- (23) Spanish-American War

There is a flat part of the same ceiling. It is coffered and is painted gold with red trim. The walls have a continuous cornice of Adamesque design combined with double pilasters and a center panel.

6. Hardware: Hardware of note includes the wrought-iron entrance doorknobs and heavy wrought-iron pulls on the screen in the foyer. Of great importance are the bronze door fixtures which exist throughout the building with the seal of the City of Kingston on them.
7. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating: The building is heated by an oil burning furnace.
  - b. Lighting: Several notable incandescent fixtures exist. The most elaborate is the multi-tiered wrought-iron chandelier in the Council Room. This fixture is black with gold delineation. Four similar fixtures of smaller scale are placed in the corners of the room. Bracket fixtures are in the same style. Other wrought-iron and glass hanging lights exist in the stair wells and along the main corridor. On the exterior there are iron bracket fixtures on either of the side porches. In front of the main entrance two extremely ornate wrought-iron street lamps are posted on cut stone medieval bases.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building is located on a hill on the north side of Broadway. It is set well back and dominates the area of the street where the former villages of Kingston and Rondout join.
2. Outbuilding: A brick outbuilding with a hipped roof stands to the east of the City Hall.

Prepared by William C. Badger  
Historian  
Historic American Buildings Survey  
Summer 1972

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) under joint sponsorship of the National Park Service and the Kingston Historic Landmarks Preservation Commission with financial assistance from the New York Council on the Arts. Measured and drawn during the summer of 1972 under the direction of John Poppeliers, chief of HABS, and under the supervision of Roy Eugene Graham (University of Texas at Austin) by Philip D. Ward (University of Washington), A. Carol Boerder (University of Texas at Austin), M. Morgan Gick (University of Notre Dame), and Stephen O. Fildes (Texas Tech University). The drawings were edited in December 1972 by architect John Burns. The written architectural and historical data was prepared by William C. Badger (University of Pennsylvania), the project historian, and edited in January 1980 by Susan McCown, a historian in the HABS office. The photos were taken in August 1973 by Jack E. Boucher of HABS staff.